VANCOUVER ISLAND ST ASSOCIATION

VISTA NEWSLETTER

ATARI 520ST JULY 1987 ATARI 1040ST

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

This month I like to talk about two topics, the formation of a Special Interest Group (SIG) and the Vista survey.

For several months I have been thinking of having a separate meeting for those persons interested in writing software or developing hardware for the ST. The group would be open to any club member. The reason for forming such a group would be to create a pool of knowledge of the ST. The software and hardware potential of the ST has be barely touched. Many of the software packages for the ST that exist today do not exploit the full power of GEM, the Graphics Environment Manager of ST. Such exploitation could lead to very user-friendly software. Topics that I would like to see covered include of course GEM/GEMDOS, programming languages,applications, programming techniques, hardware upgrades, and external hardware interfacing. This exchange of information hopefully will lead to the development of some creative software and hardware. The first meeting is set for the July 18, the third Saturday of the month. The first topic will be on GEM Windows, Dialogs Boxes and Alerts Boxes and choice of programming language for development. If you are interested please call me at 478-3075 and leave me your name and number.

Onto the second topic. By the time you read this you should have received a questionaire in your mailbox. It is asked that you complete the form as soon a possible. The results of the survey will be presented in the next newsletter and next meeting. This survey is designed to help tailor the functions of the club to the needs of it's members.

EDITORIAL

In this issue we are going to look at spreadsheets, but because of lack of contributors, due to summer vacations, it will be somewhat abbreviated. Sylvia was quite right when she, in the June issue, said that I would rave about the fair in Seattle. The reason I didn't do it then was that I thought that with both Bob and Sylvia writting articles about it, you the reader would have been getting my feelings as well. The only thing I can add is that I bought a Magic Sac at the fair. And I must say that I was very sceptical. After the disappointing look I had at the IBM emulator, I didn't expect much. In fact I bought it mainly because it had a built in clock which I needed. Great was my surprise when I saw "Welcome to MacIntosh" on my ST screen, and when it ran MacWrite, MacPaint and MacDraw with no problems, I was amazed. With version 3 software, however, there was a lot of software that would not run. I now have version 4.32 and most software for the Mac will run using this version. For more information on the Magic Sac see article inside.

Produced with Publishing Partner, and an Atari ST

SPREADSHEET

A spreadsheet is a giant sheet of electronic accounting paper. Each cell in a spreadsheet can hold text, a number, or a formula. A text cell is usually used for identifying a portion of a spredsheet-for example, "Yearly Sales" or "Total". A number cell simply holds a number that is used in the calculations. A formula cell is the real meat: it relates number cells and other formula cells using a mathematical formula; for example the cell that calculates profit might be set to price minus cost. A spreadsheet can be used for anything from calculating your taxes to forecasting your net worth.

SWIFTCALC ST

SwiftCalc ST from Timeworks is a powerful enough program for most people, though it is missing some of the of the common spredsheet features, such as macros. Its fatal flaw, however, is its user interface, which is inconsistent, clumsy and slow updating the screen. If you are interested in the spreadsheet to complete your Timeworks package, weigh your options carefully: any spreadsheet that can load DIF files should be able to read DataManager (also from Timeworks) files written out in SwiftCalc format, and if the spreadsheet can print to disk (most can) you can load it into WordWriter (Timeworks) as an ASCII file and merge it with your document. In its present state, I wouldn't buy SwiftCalc, except maybe to get the graphing program if I didn't already have DataManager. With the GEM/Keyboard schizophrenia removed and the speed problem resolved, it would be a valuable and useful program.

Matt Loveless

OTHER SPREADSHEETS

The most powerful spreadsheet for the ST is VIP. And the latest version uses GEM very effectively, making it user friendly. VIP like its parent program LOTUS 123 on IBM can be used as a database and a primitive wordprocessor. VIP is a fullfeatured spreadsheet including powerful macros.

Other Spreadsheets to consider are A-Calc and EZ Calc. Both are easy to useand GEM based. EZ Calc has more features than A-Calc.

THE TRUTH, NOW

I am using an IBM at work and at home I use my ST. Since I bought the Magic Sac, I have also been introduced to the MacIntosh. So I thought it was time to get rid of some misconceptions and to look at the merrits of each machine.

The truth is that IBM, as of this writting, runs the best wordproccessing software. That is, if you need all the features, like multiple columns, autumatic hyphenation and reformatting, mailmerge, plus powerful dictionaries and thesauruses. Microsoft introduced "WORD" for the Mac and "WRITE" for the ST. But unfortunately both have bugs. The Mac version has less than the ST.

I was always under the impression that when it came to spreadsheets IBM, with its "LOTUS 123" program, was the best. That was before I tried "EXCELL" on a Mac. Not only does EXCELL have the same or more features, it also outperforms LOTUS when it come to number crunching, and it is infinitely more user friendly. On the ST we, of course, have a LOTUS clone called VIP, but it doesn't quite have the features nor the speed of LOtus on a turbo IBM with math coproceesor.

When it comes to databases, I am not qualyfied to judge them. I need them but I don't like them. My judgement, therefore, is strictly based on ease of use and not of power. I need a database to keep track of my monthly invoices, to maintain a list of VISTA members, and to mail-merge letters. To do that easily you need an integrated package (wordprocessor, database and spreadsheet in one). Unforfunately, a program like that is not available, yet, for the ST. Microsoft's "WORKS" for the Mac is a wonderfully easy to use program for those of you who need a user friendly database.

When it comes to CAD (computer Aided Design). programs, IBM with its AutoCad and Mac with MiniCad probably are running neck in neck feature wise. But MiniCad again is much more user friendly. I use MacDraft for structural engineering drawings and I am very pleased with it. CAD programs for the ST are relatively new and the best one I have seen comes from Michtron and is called "GFA Draft".

The newest computer software, Desktop Publishing is well represented on the ST with "Publishing Partner", in fact it is probably just as good as the ones for the IBM and the Mac.

Paint programs are also well represented on the ST with several excellent programs only rivalled my the Mac, but the Mac can't show them in colour. On the other hand, drawings can easily be moved say to be included in a document with a Mac. Whereas, that is difficult if not impossible to do with an ST.

Hardware wise neither of the other two can match the ST in ease of use. The IBM is antagonizingly slow in boot up and the 51/4" floppies are inefficient and vulnerable(250K vs 720K). The Mac doesn't allow you to eject the disk manually, you have to eject via the Software. The System has to be on every disk and takes up over 200K of disk storage similar to old 520STs. On the other hand drawing files which take up 32K on an ST disk only take up 2-4K on a Mac

Of course when we talk about games no one comes close to an ST.

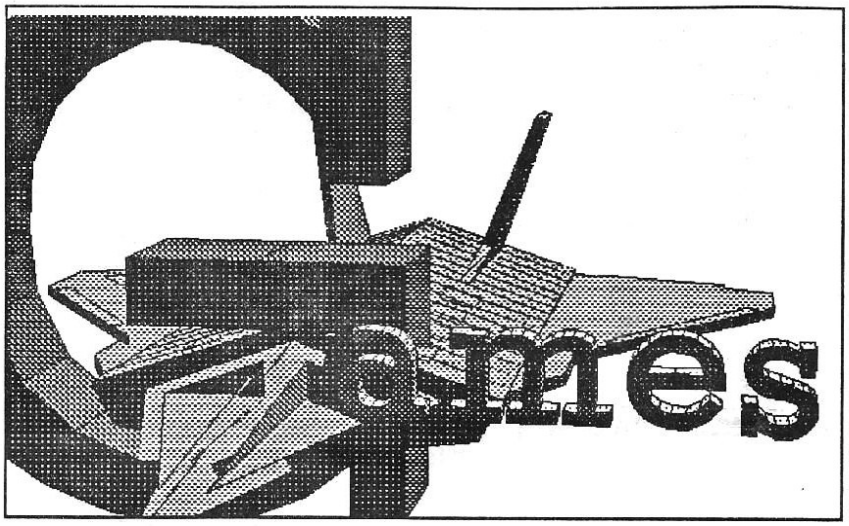
IBM and Mac have been on the market longer than the ST and the software, generally, is therefore better. But the ST is rapidly catching up.

MAGIC SAC

Several people have asked me which Mac programs work on the ST with a Magic Sac. Here are the ones I have tried or I have been told by others* that are working.

MacWrite 2.2, MacPaint, MacDraw, Macdraft, Macproject, Full Paint Super Paint, Excell*, Works, Microsoft's Word 1.05, Ready Set Go Page Maker 2.0*, Switcher 5.01 StatView 512 +, StatWorks 1.2 Cricket Graph, Freeterm, PG Term

Epsons & compatibles run flawlessly with a program called Epstart.



STAR RAIDERS

This game was rewritten for the St. It is a shoot them up type of game and require a joystick. It is in colour with terrific graphics. When you start this game you are alone in space, defending 3 space stations. Alien spaceships outnumber you 20:1 and they are moving in on the three stations simultaneously. your job is to jump through hyperspace and prevent the aliens from taking over the stations. You can play this at four levels; novice, pilot, warrior and commander. I can master the novice level but none of the other. You start out with 10000 units of fuel, and when you run out you can dock at one of the space stations and refuel. It is fairly addictive and fun to play. (ATARI $30US)

ARENA

This game comes from Psygnosis, UK and requires a colour monitor and joystick. Practice is the key to success in this game. There isn't anything novel-or even very interesting-about ARENA, other than the tremendous graphics. What the game boils down to is banging as fast as possible on the keys and then picking the right time to hit the space.....er.....jump key. That's all there is to it. ($35US)

-Rick Teverbaugh

GATO

Gato is a one-player simulation that gives you full control of and responsibility for a World War II combat submarine. Twenty missions are included on the disk.

As captain, you must control the elements that keep your craft in good condition and yout crew in good health-oxygen, battery, and fuel levels; speed and direction; torpedo and mine quatities, etc. Managing the sub is not an easy task, but you do have maps on hand to guide you-at least on the beginner levels. On higher levels-there are ten in all-it takes more shots to down an enemy ship, the enemy craft show up differently on your display maps, and the instructions for your mission are transmitted in Morse Code rather than being printed out on the screen as they are when you start out.

Shortcommings; it's annoying seeing a ship through the periscope, when it is on the other side of the island. Nor are sound effects and graphics used to anything like the potential of the ST.

All in all, Gato is a good and entertaining simulation that could use a little polishing. *Andy Eddy*

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SYLVIA"S CORNER

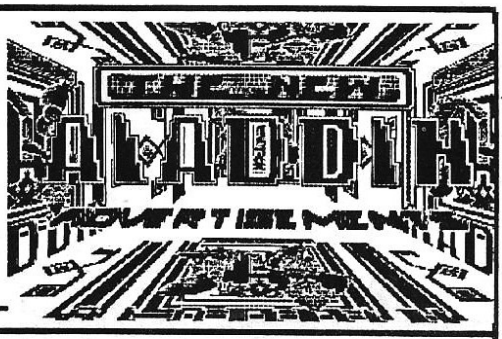
by Sylvia Hanna

This month, I would like to tell you about some of the programs I purchased in Seattle at the Atari Trek Fair. The one I'm having the most fun with is "Certificate Maker" I also bought the Certificate Library Volume 1 which has an additional 100 certificates and comes with lots of neat coloured stickers to put on the finished certificate for a real professional looking result. They are easy to make and sure create a lot of fun when the recipient receives it. The main program has 219 certs and 24 boarders with another 100 certs and 24 more boarders on the library disk. There is bound to be a fitting cert for anyone you know for any occasion you could think of. Buy it - it's fun!

Another program I bought is Michtron's "SUPER DIRECTORY" which is a powerful but easy to use disk cataloging program that makes finding and organizing your files fast and simple. (It says on the box!) I have been waiting for my summer holidays to start so I would have enough time to get to this rather large job. I have both July and August off so I should get to it.

I can't praise the new "ALADDIN", magazine on disk too highly. I'm really impressed with it. The 2 to 3 disks come every other month and require a double-sided drive and colour monitor. They have software/hardware reviews - movie/video reviews - fiction - games - food - contests - news - and much, much more! I think the price was $79.00 U.S. for the years subscription and I'm anxiously awaiting the next issue. It took me over four hours just to read the first issue. It's jam packed with lots of pictures and contains the best digitized pics seen anywhere. The hard plastic case they come in is great for storing the disks on your bookshelf.

Gerry & I are off for a vacation to Edmonton. Look out Electric T. West Edmonton Mall here I come!.



NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 4th, 1987. It will be at the Saanich Library from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

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